

History of the 661st Tank Destroyer Battalion

Submitted by: Hubert J. McEntee

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(EDITOR'S NOTE: Hubert sent us a copy of a booklet that we believe was printed in Europe at the end of the war.)

THE COAT OF ARMS OF THE 661st TANK DESTROYER BATTALION!



Superimposed upon a shield of yellow are the symbols indicative of the battalion's service in the ETO. Across the top of the shield is a pillbox and dragon teeth representing the Siegfried Line of the Western Front where the battalion fought in February 1945. At the bottom of the shield is a church steeple indicative of the battles of the battalion from the Siegfried Line to the Rhine River through such towns as Dickersheid, Rescheid and Oberrefferchied. The curved band with the wavy line represents the Rhine River which the

battalion crossed in March, 1945. The monument at the top of the shield is a silhouette of the Monument of Nations in Leipzig. It symbolizes the actions of the battalion which spearheaded the drive of the 1st U.S. Army into Leipzig in its campaign to the East and meeting with the Army of the USSR.

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The 661st Tank Destroyer Battalion, though young, has a proud history. The Battalion came into being as a result of a need in the United States Army for a fighting element so equipped and trained as to effectively combat and destroy the Panzer Korps of the Wehrmacht of Adolph Hitler's Germany.

It was on the 17th of April 1943, that the thirteenth newly activated Tank Destroyer Battalion - the 661st Tank Destroyer Battalion - was organized at Camp Bowie, Texas. Men from almost every state in the Union were recruited to form its ranks, and in due time they embarked on a training program that, although essentially centered around Camp Hood, Texas, seat of the Tank Destroyer Center, was destined to carry them through a succession of training areas.

Through long hot weeks under the scorching sun of the Lone Star State, the training progressed from Basic to Advanced, and at no time was there a failure of all elements of the Battalion to meet the standards required of the Army Ground Forces. The esprit de corps was high, and the desire to face the combat test was great. It was soon to come.

As other battalions fell by the wayside, the 661st forged ahead. From the schedules of Advanced Training it emerged successfully to engage in a seven-week program of rigorous maneuvers at Camp Claiborne, Louisiana. Confidence in field operations was engendered, and further strengthened by additional training at Camp Swift, Texas. Combined operations with Armor at Camp Bowie, Texas, and Camp Chaffee, Arkansas, rapidly brought the Battalion to the climax of its training career.

On December 22nd, 1944, the 661st entrained for Camp Shanks, New York, and on January 9th, 1945, embarked for the European Theatre of Operations. Early in the morning of January 23rd, at Le Havre, France, the Battalion set foot for the first time on foreign soil. On February 9th, after two weeks of preparation at scattered points along the Normandy coast, the 661st began a long, arduous march from the interior of France to the combat zone at Bullingen, Belgium. Hard

pressed for time by higher authority, the men of the Battalion turned stevedores in order to get their equipment off the ships, only to launch a forced march of more than 350 miles immediately thereafter, without respite. Through snow and rain the long convoy toiled forward, arriving safely at its destination in the late afternoon of Sunday, February 11th.

It was five days later - February 16th, 1945 - that the grim test of combat came. The Battalion entered the line in the vicinity of Krinkelt and Rocherath, Belgium, in support of the 69th Infantry Division of the First United States Army. In their initial encounter with the enemy on February 25th, the men of the 661st were impressively successful. Machine gun nests were destroyed, pillboxes neutralized, prisoners taken. Quickly following this engagement, a swift advance was effected through the Siegfried Line, and early in March the Battalion was well inside Germany at Schmidtheim.

On March 23rd, after a few days' rest, the 661st again moved into the line, supporting the 69th Infantry Division's spearhead offensive against the Rhine River, and on March 27th the Battalion crossed this historic water barrier to unleash a series of onslaughts that toppled such famous landmarks as Ehrenbreitstein, Nieder-Lahnstein and Bad Ems. Many other towns and villages fell as the First United States Army drove for a juncture with the Ninth in the north: Eschenau, Wetzlar, Giessen, Fritzlar and Naumberg.

From the Naumberg sector was projected the eastward push to Kassel and the Werra River. Over extremely hilly terrain, and against constantly stiffening opposition, the Battalion closely supported the 69th's advance until the temporary objective was attained in the crossing of the Werra River, April 9th. Prisoners were plentiful.

There followed again a succession of towns and cities captured by the marching 661st as it pressed closely behind the armored elements in the push toward the heart of Reich. Heiligenstadt fell, then Dinglestadt, Freyburg, Schlotheim, Kolleda and Weissenfels, where the famous old castle became a fortress for fanatical youths of the Hitler Jugend and Volksturmiers. Then Pegau, on the highroad to Leipzig, was taken.

At the approaches to Leipzig the Battalion met its sternest opposition. German flak batteries roared into action in a frantic attempt to check the advance. Initial progress was slow. Constant air bursts made it difficult for the destroyers to maneuver into suitable gun positions and engage targets. Nevertheless, flak batteries and enemy strongpoints met destruction from the Battalion's guns, and on April 18th the infantry closed in on the historic city of Leipzig.

In all, 120 flak guns were destroyed or neutralized. Prisoners poured in. As the assault of the city proper entered its final stages, elements of the 661st were engaged in striking to the heart of the beleaguered metropolis. Under the terrific bombardment, the City Hall, nerve center of Leipzig's defenses, capitulated. Other elements of the 661st aided in the systematic reduction of strongpoints at the railroad terminal and at the Battle of the Nations monument. Many prisoners were taken. Many of the Nazi defenders who fanatically resisted were destroyed.

Up to the present time, the Battalion as a whole fought its most impressive engagement at Leipzig, and has reason to be proud of its efforts in the taking of this city, historically famed for its resistance in the Napoleonic battles of the 19th century.

As of this date, April 25th, 1945, the 661st Tank Destroyer Battalion has taken 727 prisoners, destroyed or neutralized many machine gun nests and strongpoints and marched over 1200 miles. All this in but three months.

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**HISTORY OF THE 661st
TANK DESTROYER BATTALION**

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Here this history pauses. But there is every prospect that succeeding chapters will be most eminent. As the 661st Tank Destroyer Battalion stands along the Mulde River east of Leipzig awaiting the historic merger of the East and West Fronts, there is a strong sense of Victory - Victory in which the 661st Tank Destroyer has played a brief but contributory part.

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Commanding the Battalion is Lt. Colonel DONALD B. MILLER, a graduate of West Point, with 6 years service. Before coming to the Tank Destroyer Center and activating the 661st, Lt. Colonel MILLER served with the 9th Infantry Regiment of the Second Infantry Division, commanding the AT Company and later the 2nd Battalion with a tour as the Regimental Operations Officer.

Lt. Colonel MILLER has attended the Infantry School, the Tank Destroyer School and the Command to General Staff School.

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ROSTER OF BATTALION STAFF

- Lt. Colonel Donald B. Miller *Commanding Officer*
- Major Phillip M. Sleet *Executive Officer*
- 1st Lt. Ralph N. Kent *S-1*
- Captain George F. Higgins *S-2*
- Captain William A. Connolly, Jr. *S-3*
- 1st Lt. Anthony J. Polito *S-4*
- Captain Robert L. Doupe *Motor Officer*
- 1st Lt. Legrand G. Woolley *Bn. Surgeon*
- 1st Lt. Gilbert J. Romero *Ln. Officer*
- CWO Earl Lazar *Personnel Officer*
- M/Sgt. Estel H. Snyder *Sergeant Major*
- M/Sgt. John P. Hughes *Motor Sergeant*
- T/Sgt. William F. Mongale *Supply Sergeant*
- T/Sgt. Joseph C. Skinner *Operations Sergeant*
- T/Sgt. Robert J. Gould *Intelligence Sergeant*

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HEADQUARTERS COMPANY

661st TANK DESTROYER BATTALION

- Captain Joseph L. Marquis *Commanding Officer*
- 1st Lt. Gerald V. Albertson *Executive Officer*
- 1st Lt. John F. O'Shaughnessy ... *Communications Officer*
- 1st Lt. Robert L. Stone *Transportation Officer*
- CWO Wesley R. Strange *Motor Officer*
- 1st Sgt. Robert M. Barrows *1st Sergeant*
- T/Sgt. John G. Becker *Personnel Sergeant*
- T/Sgt. Walter J. Gorski *Motor Sergeant*
- T/Sgt. Arthur A. Drennan *Communications Sergeant*
- S/Sgt. John J. Ryan *Supply Sergeant*
- T/4 Arthur M. Athey *Mess Sergeant*
- S/Sgt. Harland R. Kumm *Motor Sergeant*
- S/Sgt. Joseph L. Blanke *Radio Chief*
- S/Sgt. William A. Wells *Assistant Supply Sergeant*
- Sgt. Harry M. Curnow *Message Center Chief*
- Sgt. James L. Hogan *Transportation Chief*
- Sgt. Emmett W. Farley, Jr. *Ammunition Sergeant*
- Sgt. Ralph L. Kennett *Surgical Technician*

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COMPANY "A"

661st TANK DESTROYER BATTALION

- Captain James A. LaDu *Commanding Officer*
- 2nd Lt. Harold C. Clark, Jr. *Executive Officer*
- 1st Lt. Cuy W. Nowels *Platoon Leader*
- 1st Lt. Harold A. Molin *Platoon Leader*
- 1st Lt. John F. Sherlock, Jr. *Platoon Leader*

- 1st Sgt. Clifford C. Guerra *1st Sergeant*
- T/Sgt. Howard J. Beesley *Motor Sergeant*
- S/Sgt. J.H. Schoenenberger *Supply Sergeant*
- S/Sgt. John M. Agee *Mess Sergeant*
- S/Sgt. Dan H. Bush *Platoon Sergeant*
- S/Sgt. Joseph F. Carrol *Platoon Sergeant*
- S/Sgt. William L. Blakeman *Platoon Sergeant*
- S/Sgt. Sylvanus P. Baker, Jr. *Recon Sergeant*
- Sgt. James L. Justmann *Radio Sergeant*
- Sgt. Roy A. Billington *Gun Commander*
- Sgt. Bernard E. Caylor *Gun Commander*
- Sgt. Rex M. Conner *Gun Commander*
- Sgt. John A. Kluchanovich *Gun Commander*
- Sgt. Mike Kotnik, Jr. *Gun Commander*
- Sgt. William J. Layer *Gun Commander*
- Sgt. Ralph Migliaccio *Gun Commander*
- Sgt. Richard L. Nowadnick *Gun Commander*
- Sgt. Rodney E. Pipher *Gun Commander*
- Sgt. Jack T. Sutor *Gun Commander*
- Sgt. Warren E. Tuthill *Gun Commander*
- Sgt. Earl A. Wolfe *Gun Commander*
- Sgt. Howard E. Cain *Security Sergeant*
- Sgt. Fred A. Major, Jr. *Security Sergeant*
- Sgt. Paul Rickin, Jr. *Security Sergeant*

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COMPANY "B"

661st TANK DESTROYER BATTALION

- Captain William J. King *Commanding Officer*
- 1st Lt. Walter W. McFarland *Platoon Leader*
- 1st Lt. George W. Reaves, Jr. *Platoon Leader*
- 2nd Lt. James McManus *Platoon Leader*
- 1st Sgt. Carlo Scampini *1st Sergeant*
- T/Sgt. Charles W. Wilkins *Motor Sergeant*
- S/Sgt. James T. Leach *Supply Sergeant*
- S/Sgt. Ralph G. Nicholas *Mess Sergeant*
- S/Sgt. John Harpootlian *Radio Sergeant*
- S/Sgt. William H. Bass *Platoon Sergeant*
- S/Sgt. Ralph W. Bragg *Platoon Sergeant*
- S/Sgt. Thomas A. Caddick *Platoon Sergeant*
- Sgt. Lawrence Aldenhoevel *Recon Sergeant*
- Sgt. Roland De Carie *Gun Commander*
- Sgt. Roscoe B. Doebler *Gun Commander*
- Sgt. Elmer E. Ehrhard *Gun Commander*
- Sgt. Richard Furman *Gun Commander*
- Sgt. Phillip J. Gagliardi *Gun Commander*
- Sgt. Hallie B. Haire *Gun Commander*
- Sgt. Rufus T. Holcomb, Jr. *Gun Commander*
- Sgt. Andrew W. Laurich *Gun Commander*
- Sgt. Charles G. Setliff *Gun Commander*
- Sgt. William E. Snidow *Gun Commander*
- Sgt. Charles B. Stuart *Gun Commander*
- Sgt. William T. Thompson *Gun Commander*
- Sgt. William C. Alexander *Security Sergeant*
- Sgt. Carl A. Repman, Jr. *Security Sergeant*
- Sgt. Stanley C. Werstler *Security Sergeant*

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COMPANY "C"

661st TANK DESTROYER BATTALION

- 1st Lt. Verle L. McNealy *Commanding Officer*
- 1st Lt. Robert H. MacLeod *Executive Officer*
- 1st Lt. Alan D. Cameron *Platoon Leader*
- 1st Lt. Howard K. Matlack *Platoon Leader*
- 1st Sgt. Paul Miller *1st Sergeant*
- S/Sgt. Robert Henderson *Radio Sergeant*
- S/Sgt. Charles E. Shearer *Mess Sergeant*
- S/Sgt. Grant T. Bridgers *Supply Sergeant*
- S/Sgt. Gordon L. Cashman *Platoon Sergeant*
- S/Sgt. Thad J. Maciejewski *Platoon Sergeant*

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**HISTORY OF THE 661st
TANK DESTROYER BATTALION**

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COMPANY "C" (Continued)

| | |
|----------------------------------|-------------------|
| S/Sgt. Kenneth D. Morgan | Platoon Sergeant |
| Sgt. Stanley R. Anderson | Gun Commander |
| Sgt. Lee Barczewski | Gun Commander |
| Sgt. Rodney G. Hord | Gun Commander |
| Sgt. Donald D. Klump | Gun Commander |
| Sgt. John A. Ledford | Gun Commander |
| Sgt. Marcel W. Pugsley | Gun Commander |
| Sgt. Romaine F. Repair | Gun Commander |
| Sgt. Mark J. Ringelstetter | Gun Commander |
| Sgt. Julius R. Slopek | Gun Commander |
| Sgt. LeRoy E. Stevens | Gun Commander |
| Sgt. Louis A. Tyree | Gun Commander |
| Sgt. Andrew G. Walandy | Gun Commander |
| Sgt. Stephen A. Sadowski | Security Sergeant |
| Sgt. Claude G. Wilson | Security Sergeant |
| Sgt. Charles M. Turley | Security Sergeant |

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**RECONNAISSANCE COMPANY
661st TANK DESTROYER BATTALION**

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|-------------------------------------|-------------------|
| Captain Eugene E. Oja | Company Commander |
| 1st Lt. Almon S. Hougard | Executive Officer |
| 1st Lt. Robert M. Wilkins | Platoon Leader |
| 1st Lt. James L. Carlin | Platoon Leader |
| 1st Lt. James D. McAlexander | Platoon Leader |
| 1st Lt. Anthony Zielkiewicz | Platoon Leader |
| 1st Sgt. Eugene A. Jackson | 1st Sergeant |
| S/Sgt. Hubert J. McEntee | Radio Sergeant |
| S/Sgt. Andrew M. Fraser | Mess Sergeant |
| S/Sgt. Thomas P. O'Hearn | Supply Sergeant |
| S/Sgt. Phillip J. Todd | Motor Sergeant |
| S/Sgt. Soles H. Howlett | Platoon Sergeant |
| S/Sgt. Richard W. Hoffman | Platoon Sergeant |
| S/Sgt. Oscar M. Hauenstein | Platoon Sergeant |
| S/Sgt. Frank A. Krebs | Platoon Sergeant |
| Cpl. Frederick W. Baumgartner | Section Sergeant |
| Cpl. Fred H. Domianus | Section Sergeant |
| Sgt. Charles E. Clemmer | Section Sergeant |
| Sgt. Bernard E. Epperly | Section Sergeant |
| Sgt. Theodore Sabulsky | Section Sergeant |
| Sgt. Burnell T. Scott | Section Sergeant |
| Sgt. Benjamin J. Armour, Jr. | Section Sergeant |
| Sgt. Robert M. Yabroud | Section Sergeant |

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CITATIONS

Bronze Star Medal for Heroic Achievement

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|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1st Lt. Anthony Zielkiewicz | 1st Lt. Howard K. Matlack |
| Sgt. William E. Snidow | Sgt. LeRoy E. Stevens |
| Sgt. Mark J. Ringelstetter | Pfc. Jack C. Mucia |
| Sgt. Burnell T. Scott | Pfc. Ignatius C. Alletto |
| Pfc. Henry G. David | Sgt. Lewis A. Tyree |
| Pfc. Floyd L. Smith | Sgt. Romaine F. Repair |
| Pfc. Edward S. Teixeira | Pfc. Arthur D. Crager |
| 1st Lt. Verle L. McNealy | |

Bronze Star Medal for Meritorious Service

| | |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Lt. Col. Donald B. Miller | 1st Lt. Guy W. Nowels |
| Capt. Robert L. Doupe | 1st Lt. Ralph N. Kent |
| Capt. James A. LaDu | S/Sgt. John H. Schoenenberger |
| Capt. William J. King | T/Sgt. John Gramata |
| 1st Lt. Harold A. Molin | Sgt. Elmer E. Ehrhart |
| T/5 John W. Roth | Sgt. Richard Furman |
| Pfc. Henry J. Newstein | S/Sgt. Ralph W. Bragg |
| Sgt. James L. Hogan | T/Sgt. Charles W. Wilkins |

PROFILE OF GLENN L. FELNER

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**Study in Rwanda leads
Glencoe man to offer help**

GLENCOE NEWS Thursday, September 22nd, 1994

By Bob Brettschneider, Staff Writer

It was the "lure of adventure" that first took Glenn Felner to the tiny African nation of Rwanda, where he climbed mountains to come face-to-face with gorillas.

Today, however, the Glencoe resident's interest in the nation is more pressing, working to raise money to assist its traumatized populace in the aftermath of war.

Felner is now awaiting the last of U.S. State Department paperwork that reauthorizes him as an honorary consul of Rwanda.

The post basically makes him the country's representative in this country while retaining his U.S. citizenship. It entails assisting travelers with visas and handling inquiries from businesses.

He acknowledges it's hard to talk about the possible extinction of the animals in light of the people massacred over the summer. But his love for these beasts remains strong and he is also working to raise money to forestall their extinction.

"At last count there were only 600 gorillas left in the world," he said, adding that half the gorilla population lives in Rwanda's Virunga National Park.

"We don't know how many there are now," he said of the war's impact on the gorillas, but he added it is not promising.

"For want of wood, people are cutting down the forests which the gorillas rely upon for food. If these gorillas are gone, they are gone forever."

Felner, a World War II veteran decorated with the Bronze Star, adventurer, pilot, scuba diver and world traveler, decided to travel to Rwanda in 1987 after reading Diane Fossey's book, *Gorillas in the Mist*.

"I went alone, I had no reservations and took a plane into Kigali from Nairobi. Then I rented a car and headed for the mountains.

"I loved the country, its hills and forests, its beautiful people," he continued.

"I had a wonderful experience spending two days within arm's length of gorillas without bars between us. I found them to be very gentle creatures."

It was during the trip that he met and talked with Rwandans affiliated with the U.S. Embassy.

They met again in this country and Felner gave them tours of Chicago, both on the ground and in a plane he piloted. A short time later he was appointed the first honorary consul for Rwanda in the United States.

This past April, however, the war and collapse of the old regime forced Felner to resign his post. As he awaits the formalities of again becoming honorary counsel, he expressed optimism the nation can enjoy a lasting peace.

"There is still a danger (militants) will want to retake the country," Felner cautioned, "but hopefully, with the help of other nations, we can again make Rwanda a pleasant place to be."

Those interested in assisting the people and gorillas of Rwanda may contact Felner at the address above.